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TIBETAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Year 2004

To,

**Ms. Catarina Tomasevski
Special Rapporteur on Education
United Nations**

Sub: Closure of a monastic school in Tibet

Respected Madam,

The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) has always remained appreciative of the fact that you have reported the poor educational status inside Tibet under Chinese authorities. We find that such monitoring and reporting help in restraining grave violations of human rights by Chinese authorities in Tibet. We thank you for the same.

Today, TCHRD would like to report on another case of deprivation of religious education with a closure of a monastic school on 29 July 2003. It's patron, Soepa Nagur, disappeared since 31 July 2003 has now reportedly surfaced. The students who are all monks and fall in the age group of 7-20 years old are concerned about their studies. Many have gone back to their respective homes while some have joined Kirti Monastery to pursue their studies in Buddhist philosophy.

As per information received by TCHRD, Ngaba Kirti Monastic School was briefly closed in March 2002 but later reopened after repeated appeals from the public. The school had been a constant target of the local Chinese authorities since 1998.

On 29 July 2003, when the school was closed for vacation, Chinese officials visited the school and brought down the Chinese national flag hoisted in the school compound and declared the school officially closed. Since the school session was to resume on 20th August, the authorities declared that students could join Bontse School (a government run co-education school in the county) if they wish to continue their studies and orders not to return to the school were issued.

On 31 July 2003, Soepa Nagur, the chief patron was summoned to Chengdu, Sichuan Province, for a meeting regarding the school. His whereabouts remain unknown until recent times. Soepa Nagur was a generous businessman who donated parts of his business

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PATRON
HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

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profit in the construction of monasteries, for activities in preservation of Tibetan culture, and in educational infrastructures. In 1996, he traveled to India to receive Kalachakra teachings (Tibetan Buddhism wheel-of-time teachings). During the period he sought audience with the Dalai Lama and also Kirti Rinpoche based in India.

Background information on Ngaba Kirti Monastic School

Ngaba Kirti Monastic School located in Ngaba County (Ch: Aba xian), Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan, was established in 1994 through the generous donations of Soepa Nagur. At the time of its inception, the school housed over three hundred novice monks and more than twenty teachers. Almost all of its students were from poor rural areas where there is no education facility. The school was a boon for the poor farmers and nomads who subsist on daily earnings and could not provide for their children's education. The school's popularity gradually rose and by the end of 1998, there were around eight hundred students.

The school is under the governance of Ngaba Kirti Monastery and the daily administration is run by four Tibetans; Choephel, Principal, Gedun Tenzin, Vice Principal, Trulku Jigme, Senior Disciplinary, and Dakpa Jinpa, Disciplinary. The curriculum included elementary Buddhist philosophy, elementary Buddhist dialectics, history, astrology, grammar, poetry, wisdom, prayers, and Tibetan calligraphy. The school produced a magazine called "Choedhung" and a newsletter. The school invited scholars from various fields to impart broader education to the students. It also organises handwriting competitions as well as other activities in the county and the winners are enrolled into the school.

Authorities' interference in the school

In 1998, the Chinese authorities showed their first resentment on the school commenting that the school must teach Chinese language and socialist theories. They also directed the school to merge with Bontse School and follow the government regulated school curriculae. Kirti Monastic School administrators disagreed with the authorities directives as the schoolhouses only monks and inclusion of lay students would hamper the student's monkhood codes. Some senior student-monks pledged to leave the school if the school was to merge with another.

However, on 28 August 1998, the authorities took over the governance of the monastic school from Ngaba Kirti Monastery and renamed it as "Chathang Nubsang" (Tib translit: Ch' thang nub srang) School. The takeover was marked by a celebration wherein high-level authorities graced the occasion and the students were made to hoist the Chinese national flag and sing the Chinese national anthem. Teachings of the former teachers were restricted and four Chinese teachers were recruited into the school to rewrite the curriculum making Chinese language the main subject. Furthermore, in October 2001, the monk-students were ordered to wear normal Chinese school going uniform instead of their monk robes. Students who wrote the former name of the school on their books were punished and writings in the school magazine and newsletter strictly controlled. Many students unable to adapt to the new regulations left the school.

In 2001, when the school was being merged with Bontse School, none of the students were willing to go to the other school. The school was disintegrating and concerned parents and general populace held a meeting wherein they voiced their concerns. The concerns were brought to the authorities notice through a representative and the school was able to return to its normalcy although for a short period. But when the situation was not getting better, the parents apparently pulled out their wards saying "it is better to be illiterate than to be

sinicized".

Monastic schools in Tibet have been the backbone of education for Tibetans. Such schools have always catered to the need of education to the masses who could not pay exorbitant school fees laid by the government. The Chinese government has been targeting monastic schools as they are deemed to be teaching "splittist" ideologies when in reality the curriculae in monastic schools are based on Tibetan culture and Buddhist philosophy. The latest to face closure is Ngaba Kirti Monastic School.

TCHRD is gravely concerned at the fate of the students. TCHRD calls upon Your Excellency to pressure Chinese authorities to reopen the school and to allow the school to follow its traditional studies based education curriculae.

TCHRD is a non-governmental organization formed in 1996 with a mission to protect human rights of the Tibetan people and to promote democratic principles within the exile Tibetan community. TCHRD is based in Dharamsala in North India.

Seeking your urgent intervention on the matter,

Yours sincerely,

Norzin Dolma (Ms.)
Senior Programme Officer
TCHRD

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